

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND AWARENESS IN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Social media is considered to be a powerful platform for communication. This platform is very effective and strong network among the people. This platform is not only used for communication but also used to share and exchange knowledge and information among the people. This study aims at investigating the role of social media on the brand awareness of private universities in Bangladesh. Social media was investigated in context of different factors interaction, trendiness, relevant content, consistency, and accessible in multiple devices. The population for this study was students of different private universities. A self-administered questionnaire survey of 476 students using convenience sampling approach was employed to collect data. Quantitative research approach namely factor analysis and multiple regression method were used in the study. The data were analyzed in SPSS 22. The findings reveal social media as significant tool in raising brand awareness among students since all of the social media factors were found to be significant predictors of brand awareness. Among all the factors, accessible in multiple device is found to have the largest role while consistency has the lowest role. Implications of the research were delineated and limitations and future research scope were presented.

KEYWORDS: Social Media Marketing, Social Media Branding & Brand Awareness.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Media is one of the biggest platforms for the universities to connect with the students as well as academicians. At the present day, every university is embracing it for their branding. To gain a maximum benefit, social media is playing a major role for university's branding. Today, social media offers the chance to hold close the community at large. Social media helps universities to create top of mind awareness which is crucial for branding. Young people as well as educators are using different social media tools to get their required information. Now, universities are doing branding through social media because it can connect more relevant people besides, universities are putting their activities like workshop, seminars, and students' achievements and so on, on the face book, twitter, instagram for their branding so that they can reach easily to their desired customers. All the universities are utilizing social media to engage all the public. Meanwhile branding is the extension of universities' social media to sustain in the competition, since it is a new voice of branding. A large number of studies has been conducted on branding through social media for commercial organizations but there is a dearth of research in academic setting. Therefore, it is worth conducting research on social media branding for universities.

Private universities in Bangladesh have grown up to a large number during last one decade. There are 104 private universities in the country right now. Even though a large number of students every year is entering into

higher education, due to this intense competition private universities are facing challenge to attract a large pool of these students. Thus, marketing to these students about the university specially the means of communication becomes a major issue now a day. According to Singh and Sinha (2017), marketing through traditional media's for organizational branding is no longer becoming useful. Furthermore, Murtiningsih and Murad (2016), mentioned that traditional marketing suffers from several drawbacks as people have the opportunity to block the information. Also, traditional marketing through television or newspaper, for example, facilitates one-way communication between sender and receiver. In this digital era, technology is playing a vital role for marketing. Many organizations including universities are utilizing technology for marketing purpose. In this connection, social media's have widespread effect on shaping consumer behavior in terms of information dissemination, exchanging thoughts and outlooks for gathering understanding and awareness, and envisage behavior after purchasing behavior (Tatar and Erdoğan, 2016). Moreover, organizations can create their brand profiles and presenting online customer service, product information and special offerings in simple, cost effective way, and continuously utilizing social media marketing (Breitsohl et al., 2015). Additionally, enlightening consumers in cost effective manner is very much functional with respect to acquaintance and awareness of the brand of the organizations in social media since large number of customers are logging in all the time (O'Flynn, 2017). Hence, social medias can be used as a key marketing activity for branding of the universities. In light of above considerations, the objective of this study is to identify the role of social media in raising brand awareness of the students about the universities. Also, the study attempts to examine the usage pattern of social media of the students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Marketing Activities

At present, social media has become an essential part of daily life for sharing information, content, and communication (Khalid 2016). It has created a new horizon in the personal and company level for interaction, participation, collaboration, and cooperation (Bruhn, Schoenmueller & Schafer 2012). Users create all contents in social media, where users can communicate with the "many-to-many" method instead of the customary "one-to-many" communication method (Pralhad & Ramaswamy 2004). Through the use of social media tools, businesses are getting the opportunity to offer their products and brand promotion, promotion and advertising at low cost and also get feedback from there (Hanna et al., 2011). Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) have found in their research that social media has reached the center point of business strategy at present by its popularity and budget-saving measures, and competitors' marketing strategies in social media encourage other marketers to do social media marketing. There are two critical aspects of using the internet and mobile technology-based online communication platforms for business marketing actions. The first is the impact of customers on their products and brand and the effect of their opinions on other customers (Sigala and Dimosthenis, 2009; Chen et. al., 2011). Secondly, the businesses use social media as their direct marketing platform. In that sense, social media is expanding the time and space of interaction of the business with potential consumers and promoting the feelings more intensively (Mersey et al., 2010).

Social media can be defined in such a way that a bunch of online applications that have created on the ideological and technical basis of Web 2.0 by which users can create and exchange their contents (Kaplan Andreas, M; Haenlein, M., 2010). Social media marketing is used directly or indirectly for the personal, product or institutional branding, awareness building or recognition, which is performed using social web tools (Gunelius, S., 2011).

Kim and Ko (2012) classified social media marketing actions for deluxe brands through entertainment, collaboration, trends, customization, and word of mouth communication. Koivulehto (2017) augmented the buying intention to these components. Seo and Park (2018) defined social media marketing acts in the airline industry through entertainment, collaboration, trends, customization and apparent risks. Sano (2014) defined social media marketing in insurance facilities through collaboration, trends, customization and apparent risk. Jo (2013) mentions marketing activities as events, information and social media advertising. Yadav and Rahman (2017) referred to social media marketing as collaboration, trends, evidence, customization and word of mouth communication. Based on this research, social media marketing activities have been defined as entertainment, evidence, information, collaboration, trends, advertising and customization. Bilgin (2018) identified entertainment, interaction, trendiness, advertisement, and customization as social media marketing activities. While, Laksamana (2018) mentioned entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and e-wom as the social media marketing activities. Murtiningsih and Murad (2016) in their study used campaign that benefits & frequency refurbished, relevant content, popular content, varied platform and application in social media as social media marketing activities. Tung et al. (2017) developed advertising campaign relevant contents, updated contents, popular contents, appears on various devices as social media marketing activities.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness means the intensity of customer satisfaction, recognition and brand recall (Percy and Rossiter, 1992; Perreault et al., 2013). According to Aaker (1991) brand awareness is a potential buyer's ability to identify or recall a brand as a member of a particular product division. Keller (2009) said that brand awareness refers to the capability to identify or recall a brand in a customer's brain in different situations. Aaker (1996) referred to brand awareness by the capacity of a customer to recognize, detect and recall of a brand in various circumstances. Additionally, Hoeffler and Keller (2002) recognized that brand awareness can be demonstrated by two factors; depth and width. Depth explains how customers can easily remember and identify the brand. And the width refers to when customers buy a commodity, how the specific brand name comes immediately to their minds. If a product has depth and width concurrently, it means a buyer will consider a specific brand while purchasing a commodity. Finally, it is said that brand awareness of that certain product is high.

Brand awareness cuts the time and risk that consumers spend for exploring the commodity while they buy it (Verbeke et. al., 2005). In this case, customers are expected to buy the brand that they know. Homburg et al. (2010) claim that brand awareness tells us about this commodity. Pikturnienė (2009) states that brand awareness (remembrance, imagination, decision-making) is an essential condition for choice. Černikovaite (2011) said that brand awareness can be a precondition for buying the product. The high-quality products or services encourage buyers to purchase products through which additional profits are made. Urbanskienė et al. (2006) claimed that brand awareness indicates whether a particular brand gets priority from a particular category in a consumer's mind and whether it occurs rapidly. This is one of the major aspects of the value of the brand. Eventually, consumers cannot evaluate a brand if they do not know the entire brand analysis. So, the brand's new target is well-known, but it keeps a high level of awareness of the market. During the brand analysis, consumer's perception of a brand can be analyzed through associations. Perhaps the most important part of the company's tactical plan is to create new customers and keep them loyal to the brand. Loyal customers upsurge the company's revenue. Increasing the awareness of the company is one of the most effective tools to increase customer loyalty. Increasing awareness among the youth is predominantly essential for every company for the successful expansion of business in the future. If young customers are not created, the number of loyal consumers will be reduced in the future

(Roesler, 2015). A lot of messages come to us daily. Different manufacturers want to tell us about their service or product. Their main purpose is to obtain the advertised service or product and also improve the company's visibility. Hsiao (2011) references some authors' opinions; this is the ability of a buyer to identify and differentiate a specific brand so that the shopper can recognize the brand instantly after seeing the trademark.

Development of Research Model

According to Vukasovic (2013), social networks, as a means of marketing, provides substantial scopes to develop a relationship between customer and brand. Recently, social media is found to be an utmost tool for many businesses for effectively connecting and endowing consumers in crafting brand identity distinctively and augmenting communications between customer and brand (So et al., 2017). Hartzel et al. (2011) mentioned that shared marketing approaches through social media's like Facebook and Twitter have significant positive effect on creating an image of a brand and generates a leveraging effect on brand–customer relationship. The widespread usage of social media has an effective role in discussing and knowing about a brand thereby promoting the brand among its users (Kumar et. al., 2007). Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) demonstrated that marketing through social media has one of the foremost consequences in raising brand awareness for business organizations. Fanion (2011) also concluded in favour of social media as a marketing tool in creating and raising brand awareness. Seo and Park (2018) demonstrated the positive effect of marketing through social media on brand awareness and brand image in the airline industry.

Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) asserts that marketing in social media has the eventual objective in securing new customers, enhancing sales, reinforcing word of mouth communication, and generating loyal customer. Tatar and Erdoğan (2016) revealed the effect of marketing activities via social media on brand awareness, purchasing intentions and brand loyalty in hospitality business. Bilgin (2018) found that social media marketing activities are noteworthy means of raising brand awareness for reminiscing customers and rooting into their minds. Social media marketing activities enhances brand awareness through increasing customers' knowledge that ultimately making them more familiar and more responsive towards brand (Xu, B. J et. al., 2010). Shojaei and Azman (2013) confirmed that social media has positive effect on brand awareness in terms of e-WOM, brand exposure and customer engagement. Işoraitè (2016) concluded that brands awareness could be raised through internet marketing tools, which notify, remind, and convince customers about their brands, products, or services. Akbar and Özgül (2018) found that social media enhances the social integration and emotional connection and integration into social routines of customers that ultimately increase brand awareness of consumers.

Organizations use social media for building or enhancing brand awareness through building online presence and adding to their circle of influence (ElAydi, 2018). Other benefits revealed by the author include obtaining high brand reach, enabling individuals to join in brand discussions and increases traffic or number of followers and the feedback that they deliver. All of these lead to increase in sales revenue in future. Social media affects customers' feeling of trust and purchase intention further than enabling communications among customers (Hajli, 2014). This means that social media acts as an efficient approach to communicate with an organization's present and prospective customers and establishing a positive brand image (Fortezza and Pencarelli, 2015). Duffett (2017) identified that communicating through social media is an effective way of framing customer outlooks. İsmail (2017) determined that social media marketing positively affects brand awareness and brand loyalty. Kim and Ko (2012) also identified the positive impact of social media on customers. Based on the above discussions, the research model has been formulated and is presented in figure 1.

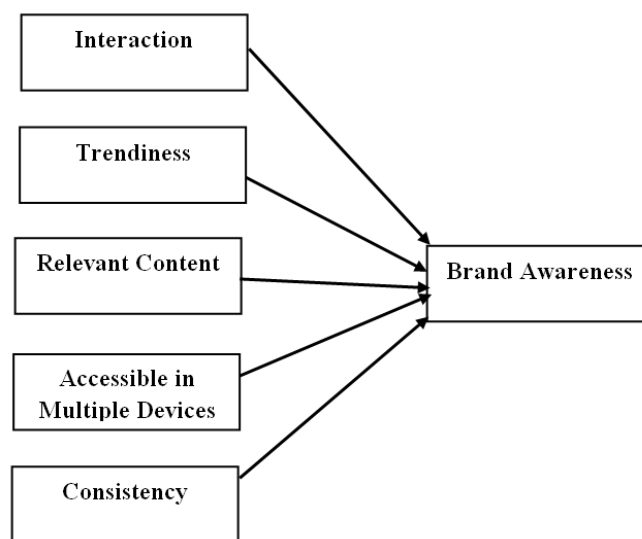


Figure 1: Research Model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey was a single cross-sectional and field survey. The unit of analysis was an individual. The respondents were selected from undergraduate and graduate level students of different private universities. The convenience sampling method was used to collect data from the respondents. The data was collected through self-administered questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section asked general characteristics of respondents such as gender, age, study level, and social media usage pattern. The second part asked questions related to different facilitating factors that of usefulness of social media on raising awareness of the brand. The measurements for social media marketing activities and brand awareness are developed from Bilgin (2018), Laksamana (2018), Murtiningsih and Murad (2016), Tung et al. (2017), and Lorenz (2017). All the constructs were developed using multiple item method and were measured using five point Likert scale with ‘1’ represents ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘5’ represents ‘strongly agree’ to provide the advantage of standardizing and quantifying relative effects.

In total, 500 questionnaires were received. Out of the returned questionnaires 476 was considered for analysis with. Data were tested for reliability by using Cronbach Alpha method. All the four validities; face validity, content validity, construct validity, and criterion validity was tested to confirm the validity of the data obtained. Descriptive statistics and linear regression method were adopted to analyze the data. The data were then analyzed in SPSS version 22.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

Demographic characteristics of the respondents participated in the study have been examined first. It is found that there are 309 males and 167 are female constituting 64.9% and 35.1% of the total respondents respectively. Also, 398 students are studying at undergraduate level representing 83.6 % and 78 are studying at graduate level comprising of 16.4% of the total respondents. Moreover, it is observed that 40 students have less than 50 friends in the social media, 60 students have 51–100 friends, 76 students have 101–150 friends, 81 students have 151–200 friends, and 219 students have more than 200 friends constituting 8.4%, 12.6%, 16%, 17%, and 46%, respectively.

Social Media Usage Pattern

Social media usage pattern of the respondents has been analyzed then. It is found that 5.1% students never follow a brand in social media referred by friends. While 32.1% is found to follow it less than half of the time, 21.4% is found to follow it half of the time, 24.4% is found to follow for more most of the time, and 17% is found to follow it all the time. Also, it is found that 21.7% students spend 1–2 hrs daily in social media while 30.4% spend 3–4 hrs, 23.2% spend 5–6 hrs, 12.7% spend 7–8 hrs, and 12% spend more than 8 hrs. In contrast, the study reveals that 58.5% students spend 1–2 hrs daily in social media while 20% spend 3–4 hrs, 10.5% spend 5–6 hrs, 4.7% spend 7–8 hrs, and 6.2% spend more than 8 hrs.

The result of the research shows that 40% of the students prefer to learn about their university through social media while 38.2% prefer to learn it from their siblings, friends, relatives, or acquainted person. Only 21.8% students prefer to learn through traditional media such as newspaper or TV advertisement, brochure, leaflet, poster of the university. Furthermore, 64.1% of the students prefer to inform about their university through social media. Whereas, 20.7% prefer to inform through traditional media. Only, 15.2% prefer to inform through siblings, friends, relatives, or acquainted person. Lastly, the study attempted to know the frequency of usage of different social medias while communicating with others. The findings reveal that mostly preferred social media by the students to communicate about their university is Facebook as 45.5% of the students mentioned it as most favoured media. Followed by Facebook other media are YouTube (23.5%) and Instagram (20.9%).

Reliability and Validity

Table 2 presents the reliability and validity of the variables. From Table 2, it is found that Cronbach's alpha value of all the research variables is above the cut-off level of 0.7. This indicates a high level of internal consistency in the reliability of the variables.

Table 2 also presents convergent validity and discriminant validity of the research variables. Convergent validity was measured by using item-to-total correlation. Items with item-to-total correlation above cut-off level (0.4) were considered for further analysis. Factor analysis with varimax was used to check the discriminant validity of the items. Items with loading factors below 0.5 were not considered. Factor analysis was used not only to measure the validity of the items but also it serves as a tool for authenticating the unidimensionality of the items of the research variables. There are several approaches to select the number of factors. In this research, factors were determined based on Eigen value. Those factors which had Eigen values more than 1 were retained for further analysis.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity of the Variables

Variable	Questionnaire Items	Factor Loading	Item-to-total Correlation	% of Variance Explained	Cronbach's Alpha
Interaction	I1	.735	.488	52.674%	.894
	I2	.574	.445		
	I3	.806	.574		
	I4	.766	.514		
Trendiness	T1	.702	.451	53.435%	.800
	T2	.818	.592		
	T3	.763	.528		
	T4	.627	.491		
Relevant Content	R1	.784	.492	60.983%	.879
	R2	.825	.550		
	R3	.732	.437		
Accessible in	D1	.757	.480	63.230%	.809

Multiple Devices	D2	.835	.582		
	D3	.792	.521		
Consistency	C1	.642	.413	58.697%	.816
	C2	.772	.538		
	C3	.808	.595		
	C4	.712	.474		
Awareness	A1	.711	.496	63.139%	.862
	A2	.833	.660		
	A3	.791	.589		
	A4	.724	.508		

Regression Result

Table 3 presents the regression result of the variables for brand awareness as dependent variable and social media marketing activities interaction, trendiness, relevant content, accessible in multiple devices, and consistency as independent variable. The overall regression model is significant with R^2 value of .512 and F value of 55.714. Also, Table 3 depicts that there is no multicollinearity is found to be present among the independent variables since the tolerance value of each of the variables is above 0.2 and corresponding VIF value is less than 5.

Regression result of Table 3 reveals that each of the social media marketing activities has significant positive impact on brand awareness. This means that each of the social media marketing activities has role in increasing brand awareness among students. However, this role is not same for all variables. It is found that accessible in multiple devices has highest effect as the β value for this variable is .247 ($t = 4.171$). This is followed by interaction ($\beta = .193$, $t = 3.228$), trendiness ($\beta = .179$, $t = 2.771$), relevant content ($\beta = .158$, $t = 2.577$), and consistency ($\beta = .106$, $t = 1.985$) with decreasing order of effect.

Table 2: Result of Multiple Regression

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Interaction	.193	3.228	.001	.516	1.938
Trendiness	.179	2.711	.007	.422	2.370
Relevant Content	.158	2.577	.011	.487	2.051
Accessible in Multiple Devices	.247	4.171	.000	.524	1.910
Consistency	.106	1.985	.048	.645	1.551

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research is a kind of study attempted to conduct in order for developing ideas about the social media usage pattern of the students of private universities in Bangladesh. Also, the study focused on gaining knowledge on how social media increase brand awareness of the students. From the research findings, it is revealed that at least for half or more of the instances students follow a brand in social media referred by their friends. Also, the findings, affirm that almost half of the students spend at least 5–6 hrs daily in social media whereas it is quite low for traditional media. Moreover, the result of the research shows that student wants to use social media along with buzz marketing approaches to know about university. In contrast, they prefer to rely mostly on social media while informing about their university. Lastly, the study revealed that the most preferred social media for students for marketing is Facebook followed by Instagram and Youtube.

Also, the study validated that each of the social media marketing activities interaction, trendiness, relevant content, accessible in multiple devices, and consistency has significant positive impact on improving brand awareness of the students. Among these accessible in multiple devices has highest effect followed by interaction, trendiness, relevant content, and consistency with decreasing order of effect.

The rising trend in number and involvement of users, social media has become a large online community in Bangladesh. Organizations have found this media to be an alluring in achieving economic benefits (Salah Uddin et. al., 2017). Social media is a great source of acquiring information from a large community. It has become a modern and current source of information for customers (Hamid et al., 2016). It has the vast potentiality of sharing new and vast information instantaneously. Social media alleviates interaction among users and sharing new and up-to-date information beyond usual networking (Wang, 2012). Universities can rip the benefit of interactive communication with students and parents through adopting social media in branding (Vukasovic, 2013). Hence, universities can get immediate feedback and suggestions about their different programs.

Users can easily read, understand, and evoke numerous information if the universities create a concise and lucid message. Websites overburdened with information poses problems for users to access the appropriate information hence make the users obscure of extracting the information and memorizing those. Thus, it is necessary to have relevant information on the websites and have those information being easily read and perceived by the users. Universities also need to have consistent information in the website in order to minimize the risks of adverse publicity.

This study has theoretical as well as practical contribution. The study integrates the model that incorporates a full range of stimulus and individual level variables along with multiple outcomes in social media marketing in private universities. This model affirms the necessity of branding through social media for private universities while elucidating the extent of the role different variables play in branding. Also, incorporation of a new dimension consistency in the model makes it more robust in terms of explaining the relationship among the variables. From managerial point of view, the findings are useful in identifying better strategy for social media marketing efforts, enhancing the impact for purchase intention and brand loyalty in the private universities. Thus, this study provides a useful guideline to the university policy makers in formulating marketing mix and establishing appropriate promotional tools and activities.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SCOPE

In spite of multifarious contributions, this research is not without limitations which need to be addressed in for offering viewpoint for future research. First, this study was a cross sectional survey that was conducted only on time. In order for having better understanding longitudinal study can be conducted in future.

Second, other factors of social media marketing that might have influence on brand awareness can be included to refine the model and develop more understanding about the effect of social media marketing on brand awareness. Third, this study included only brand awareness. Other factors of branding can be considered to gain further understanding about social media branding.

Fourth, this study concentrated only on universities in Bangladesh. It is thus necessary to include other sectors to have larger sample to get more probability in generalizing the conclusions. Finally, only social media users from Bangladesh were used as the population for the study. A study on cross cultural comparison with respect to brand awareness through social media marketing is commendable in future.

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